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Technological Change in the Auto Industry, by David Robertson and Jeff Wareham, Willowdale, Ont., CAW Technology Project, 56 pp., ISBN 0-969-2932-08

This is an excellent research study of union reaction to technological change in the Canadian auto industry. Union leaders from nearly one hundred auto assembly and parts manufacturers participated in the survey and case studies reported in this monograph.

Despite the very good response of union leaders and cooperation of automotive plants to the study there are some methodological limitations that should be pointed out. First of all, the survey and to some extent the case studies present only union reactions to technological change. Secondly, it is not apparent the authors really completed case studies but rather gathered anecdotes. A completed case study should include both management and union activities and some resolution of their efforts. Quite likely the authors found cases in process and no resolution was yet evident.

The report consists of six chapters: «The New Technologies», «Disappearing Jobs», «Transformation of Work», «The New Management Agenda», «Labour and Technological Change», and «Policy Implications». Particular chapters should be useful to union members and management wishing to determine what is the best resolution of technological change currently experienced in the automotive industry in Canada.

Chapter 1 summarizes the main types of technological change in terms of product technology, equipment technology and process technology. Process technology refers to the way work is done and includes such methods as statistical process control, just in time scheduling of inventory and simply teamwork in the plant. The authors indicate in their report that process technology is as important as introduction of new equipment or automation.

Chapters 2 and 3 describe the impact of technological change on the number of jobs and nature of jobs. Union respondents to the survey were disturbed that automation often eliminated jobs and increased management control over jobs. They were also aware that automation preserved employment and competitiveness of their plants. Also new technologies required new training for production workers, who therefore remained employable and valuable to these plants.

Management in these plants probably needed to give greater consideration to the impact of technological change on the workers. If greater consultation was extended to unions before introducing changes some of the adverse effects upon jobs might have been averted and change might have proceeded in a more cooperative and satisfactory manner for both unions and management.

Chapter 4 presents the «New Management Agenda» of seeking technological change through a more involved workforce without relinquishing control. According to the authors the «changes introduced by technology are not confined to the process of production but extend to relations in production... changes in traditions, norms and values of management». The new management agenda requires concessions from unions in terms of work practices and classifications and even threatens union representation, particularly in new factories.

The authors indicate that the «new technology» can be an opportunity to improve quality of working life for factory workers. Such benefits depend on managers taking a humanistic approach to technological change and improving working conditions. Managers who do not really change their values are becoming a burden to their companies and some are being set aside along with their autocratic practices. Such displacement of managers, not covered in this monograph, is also sad but the cost of progress.

Chapters 5 and 6 deals with new directions and policy implications of the «new technology». The authors indicate «workers and local union leaders are concerned with a broad range of impacts of new technology... job security, protection of the bargaining unit and retraining». The authors conclude that the «factors that determine the effectiveness of union involvement in technological change are the same factors that determine the outcome of any collective bargaining effort: membership education and support, leadership and sustained action».

Time will tell whether the Canadian Auto Workers take such a constructive approach to technological change and whether union participation in technological change is welcomed by management. It is not clear to this reviewer whether cooperation must be set forth in labour contracts or government legislation or whether common sense will convince both companies and unions that consultation about technological change is some of the best preventive maintenance that can be done in factories.

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Collective Bargaining and Labor Relations, Second Edition, by E. Edward Herman, Alfred Kuhn and Ronald Seeber, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1987, 621 pp., ISBN 0-13-140576-6

E. Edward Herman, Alfred Kuhn and Ronald Seeber have written a comprehensive textbook on labour-management relations in the United States. The text belongs on the bookshelves of all those who teach industrial relations.

The book consists of eighteen chapters which cover the critical parts of an introductory course in labour relations as well as a course in collective bargaining.

As the authors indicate in their preface what differentiates this text from others is its in-depth coverage of areas that are either omitted or underemphasized in other texts; specifically they cite the following chapters: «The Question of the Bargaining Unit», «Preparation for Bargaining», «Costing of Labor Contracts», the four chapters on the bargaining process, and «Management and Union Security», «Concessions and the Future of Collective Bargaining», the bargaining simulation, and recent arbitration cases.

Several of the readings highlighted by the authors are, in fact, exceptional. The chapter on concession bargaining, though brief, provides many insights into one of the most important industrial relations issues of the past few years. Similarly, the chapter dealing with management and union security is notable for its conceptual clarity. Clarity is also evident in the well thought out and comprehensive collective bargaining simulation. The simulation comes complete with several standard evaluation questionnaires for both the students and the instructor.

The main weakness of this text is not lack of substance but absence, in several instances, of a lively writing style. I attribute the lack of liveliness to the relative lack of current examples as an integral part of much of the text. This lack of integration makes the excellent substantive material seem somewhat dull. The comprehensive chapter on costing is done a disservice by beginning with a detailed description of the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates of contract costs. While this information is important the reader would be better served by an introduction giving some actual examples of how accurate costing (or the lack of it!) influenced a real set of negotiations.